

SEWER GAS AND INSANITY.

Now that public attention is being directed to the prevention of diseases, and that physicians are endeavoring to classify them, so as to distinguish between those that are preventable and those that are not, the inquiry comes to us: "Is insanity a preventable disease, in the sense that smallpox and other specific diseases are preventable?" "Is it ever due to sewer gas?" etc., etc.

These are pertinent questions. They comprehend the whole scope of preventive measures, and should be an inducement to inquirers to study the science of prevention, when they will discover that, on general principles, to avoid or prevent bad air, to prevent filth, and the neglect of sanitary laws, to learn which diseases are communicable, and which are not, they have taken a long and certain step towards the solution of the question.

Diseases that are communicable are propagated by poisons of a specific character, the same poison always resulting in a uniform career of symptoms.

Insanity does not belong to that class of diseases; and yet, mental strain, or shock, or distress of some sort, which are prominent factors of mental disorder, may be greatly influenced by the environment of the individual. A person may be mentally diseased, with the bodily functions in good working order. But let the mental processes be driven to the extreme of activity; let over-action of mind or body, or both, be accompanied with the breathing of impure air, or the inhalation of noxious vapors from cesspool or sewer, and the vital force will be diminished to a degree that will render the individual more susceptible than ever before, to the morbid influences of such surroundings; and the type of disease that may assail his mind will be of an aggravated character. In this sense, and under such conditions, if insanity should be developed, it would be fair to attribute it to the cesspool or sewer as an exciting cause.

Next comes the inquiry: Can sewer gas be stopped or arrested, if not prevented? This is the question, among



sanitarians, of the most grave import. Philanthropists have lamented the sad fact of the existence and prevailing force of this poison as a factor of human disorder. Physicians have demanded of mechanics and inventors that some efficient obstruction should be supplied that will effectually cut short the ravages of this scourge. Year has been added to year, and new contrivances have been presented with each returning epoch, but still sewer gas has poisoned the air we breathe in our dwellings and hospitals, and insanity has taken its place, side by side with other evidences of diminished vitality, and consequent inability to resist morbid impressions, while we are still striving and working for the remedy.

It is said that we live in an age of inventions, when traps and bars and drains and currents are offered in abundant profusion, each with its superior claims and promises, but yet, each with the seal of imperfection upon it, while disease stands on the threshold of human life and health, and defies the assaults of any contrivance that assumes to dethrone its cause. We have failed to find a successful assailant of sewer gas among the plumbers and mechanics, or yet, among the men of science, and experimenters; and, weary with efforts to disclose from the deep arcana of hidden powers the secret force we so much need, we at last hear a familiar voice that bids us halt and see the secret. Agnew and Richardson are names that are known to the world of medicine and science, as but few other names are known; and when they tell us that they have found "*An impassible barrier between the death in our sewers and the atmosphere in our rooms*" (Agnew); and that it will "prove an efficient safeguard, for the obvious reasons that its mercury seal cannot *dry up*, is too heavy to be *syphoned out* or *forced* under any ordinary pressure, and, being metallic, constitutes an *impassible barrier* against the transmission of *foul odors* and *disease germs*," (Richardson); we can but accept their testimony as authoritative, and congratulate the profession upon this important achievement.

We learn that this so-called "Metallic Bar" will soon be on the market, and that a glass model may be seen in operation any day, at No. 21 East Fourteenth Street, New York City.—*Reprint from Psychological Journal, Oct., 1883.*